



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MAN SENTENCED TO 10 YEARS IN PRISON FOR CONCEALING COCAINE IN A VEHICLE AT THE NOGALES GRAND AVENUE PORT OF ENTRY WORTH MORE THAN 3 MILLION DOLLARS

TUCSON, ARIZONA –The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona, announced that on January 7, 2004, Francisco Javier Rodriguez-Salazar, 7/30/74, of Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, was sentenced to 120 months by United States District Judge Ranier C. Collins, in Tucson, Arizona.

The charges stemmed from an incident that occurred on March 12, 2003, when the defendant approached the Grand Avenue Port of Entry in Nogales, Arizona, driving a Chevrolet Silverado. It was determined that the defendant was the registered owner of the vehicle. Upon inspecting the vehicle at primary, Customs Inspector Ryan Ikei discovered a dull sound emanating from the side panels of the vehicle and referred it to secondary inspection. At secondary inspection, twenty-four packages were removed from six custom made compartments that had been cut into the side panels of the vehicle. The substance inside the packages was determined to be cocaine, with a weight of 33.73 lbs. (15.79 kgs.). Subsequent lab analysis determined the cocaine to be 85 % pure. Upon being interviewed by Special Agents Mario Mendez and

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Andrew Montijo, the defendant denied knowledge of the contraband, but offered a story which inculpated his cousin from Mexico, stating that he had borrowed the car from him for eight hours a few days before.

A jury trial was held from August 12 through the 14, before the Honorable Ranier C. Collins. During the trial, the defendant testified, again repeating his no knowledge defense. Through the use of an expert witness regarding body work and automobiles, the government was able to show that the modifications to the vehicle, which were skillfully done, would have taken in excess of forty hours to complete, thereby refuting the defense as factually impossible. An expert witness testified at trial that the amount of cocaine involved in the case had a street value in Tucson of over \$200,000 but was worth in excess of 3 million dollars once it was cut and transported to urban areas away from the border.

The investigation in this case was conducted by the Bureau of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement.

The prosecution was handled by Judson T. Mihok, Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona.

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